

12
Crown Court

THE GREAT EXHIBITION.

A Sermon,

PREACHED ON SUNDAY, MAY 4TH, 1851.

BY

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1 KINGS, viii. 66.

“On the eighth day he sent the people away : and they blessed the king, and went unto their tents joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that the Lord had done for David his servant, and for Israel his people.”

THIS was on the occasion of a great national undertaking, in which the hearts of all Israelites, from one end of the land to the other, were deeply interested. The erection of the splendid temple — that palace which was for God, not for man — was a visible proof to the Jews that they were in a very different state from what they had been in a few years before, ere the victories of David, when they hid themselves in caves, and there was no smith allowed among them lest they should sharpen weapons of war. The nation had made great progress : it had

a king, like other nations ; it had crushed Moab and Ammon ; the heads of various tribes brought presents ; the kingdom was established in a popular family ; the worship of God was conducted with solemn pomp ; the psalms of David were chanted by well-arranged choirs ; a census of the people had been taken, which showed their vast multitudes and the fulfilment of the promise that the seed of Abraham should be as the stars of heaven. The king of Tyre himself paid respect to the throne of Sion, on which now sat a prince endowed with such wisdom from Heaven, that not only the queen of distant Sheba, but “ all the earth sought to Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart.” Judah and Israel dwelt safely and confidently, every man under his vine and under his fig-tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon. Judah and Israel (not yet divided and arrayed in unnatural warfare one against the other) were many, as the sand which is by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking, and making merry. The great

work of peace was the erection of the temple. There was not one pious heart, through the length and breadth of the land, which was not filled with gratitude because the nation, after so many years, was at last occupying its proper place. God had again visited them, as in the wilderness; the people and princes had willingly offered; artists and artificers, endowed with the spirit of God, had been raised up and inspired to design and execute the ornaments of the magnificent structure. A united people, a gifted monarch, peace and plenty, a pious undertaking, long contemplated and at last happily finished, stamped with God's approval as the fire fell from heaven and the cloud took possession of the sanctuary, — what was wanting to make good the promises of Deuteronomy, that this great nation should be a wise and understanding people, the joy of the whole earth, blessed in the city, blessed in the field, blessed in the basket and the store, blessed coming in, and blessed going out?

And does this make us think, brethren,

of our own times? Our nation has made great progress—has advanced in all the arts, luxuries, and conveniences of life—we have had a long peace, we have a hereditary sovereign, a settled government,—our census has been lately taken. Men resort to England from places more distant than Sheba; the attention of our people, from one end of the land to another, is fixed on a great national undertaking, which is a visible proof of their, on the whole, prosperous condition; and prince and people are together joining in a common work, with expressions of thankfulness and of dependence on the Divine blessing.

The leading idea of the Great Exhibition of this year is admirable, for it is this, that each nation should show what God has done for it, and what the Almighty has given it, both in natural advantages and in the ability and industry of its children; that each should exhibit this, not for self-glorification, but for mutual advantages, in order that there may be no secrets of science, no results of

contrivance, hidden from each other, but, as in the most liberal professions, that each inventor should not withhold the results of his wisdom and experience, in order to increase his *private* wealth and fame, but should communicate to his brethren that which may be advantageous to mankind in general, looking on what he has invented as not his own, but as God's gift to him—a gift to all *through* himself—he being only the channel of making known to others what is meant for the good of all. Here is an attempt to promote unity and good-fellowship, to strengthen all the ties which bind men together, and to counteract the selfishness and ignorance which make men jealous of each other's success, and induce them to think that the prosperity of their neighbours is a disadvantage to themselves. It is an assertion that all members of the family of man are useful to each other, constitute one body, and have a common interest in each other's well-being.

And we, in England, are thankful that it has been allowed to our sovereign to

suggest such a design, and that our land has been made the scene of an undertaking so blameless, nay, so laudable. We have reason to be thankful for the peace that has made such a meeting possible, and for the recognition of religion which has sanctified the occasion. Indeed we may look on the whole affair as being, indirectly, an effect of Christianity — a mark of its power. Such an assemblage, such a union, would not have been possible but for the Gospel. Observe that those nations that have been Christianised are also most civilised : to them are restored some of the prerogatives of Paradise ; they have power to call the various inhabitants of the realms of nature before them, to distinguish them into classes, and to assign them names. Redeemed man is, for the sake of the Redeemer, crowned with glory and honour, made to have dominion over the works of God's hands ; and all things are, day by day, more and more, put under his feet.

It is long since the nations of the earth have been so generally moved by an

occurrence which is neither sinful nor mournful. Christendom has, before now, been animated by a sense of common danger to combat with the Infidel. Nations have suffered from disorders which made the round of the globe; they have been convulsed with the epidemic of revolution, or have trembled at the terrors of a general famine; they have been arrayed one against another, to oppose or to forward the schemes of dominion which some man-hunting despot has cherished for his own cruel gratification, and for the chastisement of men. But now we have much to rejoice in and to be thankful for. Hospitality and generosity, friendship and confidence, are proclaimed; the mutual dependence of classes on each other is displayed. The work is not for the rich only, but is one in which the labourer is peculiarly interested; and while the educated have contributed their knowledge, the humblest mechanic may take a pleasure in finding his skill honoured and his labour rewarded with its proper place.

Thus may the patriot and the philan-

thropist feel; but, brethren, in this holy place, on this Lord's day, you naturally desire to have your minds directed to reflections more distinctly Christian.

The Christian, then, ought to feel somewhat anxious and humbled. He trembles lest we provoke God's wrath, remembering how an unsanctified attempt at unity resulted in disunion, when, at the Tower of Babel, men thought to make themselves a name, and drew together without God's sanction and blessing. He remembers that Solomon's glorious reign was tarnished by a sad end; the people became dissatisfied with the monarch, whom at first they so greatly respected, and all his wisdom did not secure him from sins, brought about by connexion with foreigners—sins to which his wisdom, and wealth, and renown probably gave occasion. The Christian remembers how even a pious king, Hezekiah, provoked punishment for doing what seemed nothing but natural, graceful, and liberal,—*i. e.* showing his treasures to foreigners; in which case, therefore, the offence must

have been in the spirit with which he exhibited them, a spirit of vain-glory, from which even his afflictions and his great piety did not always preserve him. The Christian remembers how Nebuchadnezzar, in the moment of the triumphant contemplation of his greatness, whilst he was in the act of saying, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" was smitten with the humiliating disorder which made him for seven years a pitiable object, and cast *him* out among brutes who had seemed to himself like a god. Lastly, the Christian remembers that while King Herod, on a set day, gorgeously clothed, made an oration and drank in the flattery offered him, God's angel struck him, because he gave not God the glory; and he, who had shone like the sun, became most loathsome, was eaten of worms before he died, and was carried out from among men covered with shame — an abomination. Such things, written for our warning, make us anxious,

whenever we detect anything of the condemned temper of mind appearing amongst ourselves.

Also, the Christian should feel humbled when he reflects that this is not, like Solomon's, an undertaking distinctly for the glory of God; that this palace is for man rather than for God; that it is easier to get men to combine for what is of this earth, and for time, than for what concerns God's glory and eternity. If men are united for science and commerce, how sadly are they divided on religion! Never more divided than now; nowhere more so than in our own land; and the consequences of division are, that we are weakened and crippled on every side. We do not promote education at home or missions abroad, as we should do, were we of one heart and one mind. In order to unite, men leave out religion; they exclude it, because that which ought to bind them together keeps them separate. Alas, alas! this Exhibition shows us as well what we can *not* do as what we *can*. It is easy to magnify ourselves, to com-

pare ourselves with ourselves, which the Apostle declares to be not wise : but what are we in the sight of God ? Our poor so improvident, wasting such sums in intemperance, and so indifferent to religion ; vice stalking, unblushing, in our streets ; such sums spent by the rich in ostentation and luxury ; so little, in proportion, given in charity ! When Christians think of these things, no wonder that they are inclined to say that we have other things to do than to boast ourselves, that their hearts are so oppressed with the sins and dangers of the church and nation that they dare not take delight in the contemplation of worldly abundance and skill ; no wonder they feel that God calls to other works as more proper for peace, and that we should give ourselves no rest till the heathen abroad are converted, and our people around us arrested in that irreligion which is fast making them heathens at home.

When good men speak thus, who but must thank them for their warning ? These are they whose deprecations may yet save the nation. As Job trembled

lest his children in their rejoicings should have provoked God, and therefore rose up early and offered sacrifices for them; so, it is to be hoped, there are many who make the dangers of their church, their country, their queen, matter of earnest prayer; and while the world, like Ahab, goes up to eat and drink, retire to the mountain of contemplation, to fall flat on the ground and pray seven times, till their holy importunity win the reversal of the curse, and cause the long-denied showers of refreshment to fall on the spiritual desert, on a land which is prosperous outwardly, but provokes God's wrath by its sins and neglects.

See therefore, brethren, for I will take upon me, according to my office, to advise you—"I speak as to wise men, judge ye what I say"—that you neither do injustice to what is good in the great work which marks this year and this metropolis, nor be so smitten with its beauty as to omit the reflections which the thoughtful Christian should cherish.

Some recognition of religion was felt to

be necessary ; men's minds were haunted by fears of evil accidents ; they felt, as heathens of old, that we might be too prosperous, and might provoke Divine vengeance. Let it not, however, be supposed that one act of religious consecration is sufficient to hallow the scene, but let each who enters that building, however often he enter it, give glory to God, and pray for peace among men, saying, " The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." Let him cry, in the words of our Litany, " From all blindness of heart, from pride and vain-glory, good Lord deliver us." Let him pray for " all sorts and conditions of men ; that He would be pleased to make His ways known unto them, His saving health unto all nations." " May it please Thee to give to all nations unity, peace, and concord." Let each acknowledge that it is God only who giveth men skill, as much now as when He endowed Bezaleel and Aholiab in the wilderness. May the sight of what authority can set in motion, what union can effect, stimulate us to labour, doing our

part towards raising and furnishing that better building which is a truer temple than Solomon's, the vast temple of the living God, the stones for which are here being shaped and polished, that they may be, noiselessly, built into Christ the corner stone, and may grow together a spiritual building, an habitation for God, through the Spirit. Let us never cease labouring in *our* way, as others labour in *their* way (and, as we know, not so effectually) to make the kingdoms of the world the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ: none labour with such encouragement, with such certainty of success, as the Christian. The palaces raised for man and for man's productions are in their nature temporary, fragile, and for a day; sadness and disappointment cannot be excluded from them: already many who toiled at the design are dead before it is finished, and some of those who wrought have not lived to see their own productions housed: it was the wise, the rich, the peaceful Solomon, who exclaimed, "All is vanity and vexation of spirit!"

But the Christian, not expecting too much from the world, escapes disappointment, and reserving his energies for the cause of God and the moral and spiritual good of man, knows that he cannot fail of a reward, for that the endeavours of the humblest, weakest, simplest, are not in vain: he knows that they, who never could have won admission for any production of theirs among the prized treasures of this world, may accomplish that which God will judge beautiful, and angels will admire, and which will be stored in Heaven, in an enduring mansion, not fragile, but eternal; not exclusive or limited; but free to all pure spirits, for ever open to the admiring contemplation of the children of eternity.

Oh, brethren, would you have been pleased to have contributed some work of genius to that neighbouring structure—would you have been glad to have helped others to have exhibited there, rejoiced to have discovered neglected genius, and to have furnished it with the means of working out its conceptions? Bethink

you that you may yourselves contribute, that you may help others to exhibit productions still more valuable, in a nobler treasure-house, to be admired by more numerous and more exalted spectators. Earth is the laboratory, heaven shall be the great treasure-house; the productions that will be valued there are human souls, our own and those of our neighbours,—souls restored to the image of God, each with the peculiar beauty which He at first designed for it, and which no other can exactly display—souls which are in themselves little worlds of untold value, for Christ died and rose again for them (even their accompanying flesh is dear to God)—souls which the Holy Ghost loves to hallow by inhabiting, and whose seemingly poor material He can make capable of expressing the mind of God and the likeness of the Saviour. It is bearable to know nothing of this world's science and magnificence, but it will be unendurable to have no name, no place, there, where God shall make up His jewels, and where He shall be admired in His saints. Harken,

for the great King, the King of the whole earth, summons the nations to contribute. He would have various specimens of human nature brought together from all climes, ranks, and circumstances. Take care that you be such as He can delight in. Seek for His indwelling Spirit, which is graciously vouchsafed to all that desire it. "Work while it is called To-day," for you have no fixed time; you know not how soon your work may be demanded of you, in order to be sealed up for inspection at the great day. Labour in your own hearts, and assist others to labour. Men are so bound together that their assistance is necessary to each other; we can accomplish nothing singly, each is incomplete without his brother. If you could only see it, there are many around you who want your advice, your example, your sympathy, whose souls are unshapely, foul, dark, most unsuitable for the honour, glory, immortality, to which they are as much called as you are. Find them out—go to their help—do God's

own work, which He is willing to effect through you—be the means of giving light to the benighted, purity to the sullied, comfort to the desponding, peace to the agitated, strength to the tempted. “Work while it is called To-day.” Life is short, but the productions of time shall be treasured in eternity.

And as this Exhibition incites us to work, so it also suggests prayer, especially prayer for unity. We heard, in the Gospel of to-day, of the one fold and the one Shepherd. Alas! those thousands that are to arrive among us from various lands during this summer, representatives of almost every nation under heaven, drawn to one common object, claiming a share in one grand common work, are they yet gathered into one fold, do they all listen to the voice of the one only Shepherd? May He who, in His providence, brought of old representatives of all nations to Jerusalem at the Feast of Pentecost, that they might hear spoken in their own tongues “the wonderful works of

God ;” and who is now again, at another Pentecost, bringing together men out of every nation under heaven,— may He grant that some good purpose may thus be answered, that unity may be promoted, that men’s hearts may be made to feel how blessed it were to be in one body, of one spirit, with one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father. May some approach be made, during these forty days, towards bringing sheep to the one fold and the one Shepherd. We can do something by praying for unity, by labouring in the cause of Christian missions, Christian education, and every other work of charity. We can do much by promoting unity and good feeling, each in our own sphere, “with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace ;” humbling ourselves for our many divisions, for the sins of our Church and nation, the sins of our families, and our own private trans-

gressions; and so moving the good Shepherd, whose own the sheep are, who knoweth them and careth for them, to show Himself as the shepherd of one flock and one fold.

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